

Supports and Incentives for Professional Development and Quality Improvement

Key Question: *What is needed to encourage practitioners in EC and AS care providers (in home-based or center-based programs) to access and utilize professional development opportunities that are connected to the quality improvement frameworks in Northern Lights and STARS?*

Clarification 1: There are a range of professional development opportunities currently available in Vermont. The intent is to focus on professional development and quality improvement opportunities that utilize the frameworks developed through Northern Lights and STARS even if the actual programs are not offered through these specific programs.

Clarification 2: There are differing needs based on practice setting: home based; center based; and school-based. Programs in school-based settings also must abide by standards and requirements through the school system. A deeper conversation is needed that includes others from school-based settings and the Department of Education that specifically focuses on this population. This conversation would explore challenges specifically in this practice setting in order to identify opportunities, supports, and incentives.

Areas for Additional Inquiry: Stakeholders noted the need for additional information and exploration to better understand the needs, motivations and barriers to professional and quality improvement for three populations: instructors, home and center based providers and school providers.

Categories Used By the Four Small Groups:

- Access
- Financial / Affordability
- Quality
- Communication / Information
- MATCH-related
- School Aged
- Mandate
- Intrinsic/Internal Motivation
- Relationships
- Responsiveness to individuals and groups (age served, level of experience)
- Systems coordination and interconnectedness
- Capital
- Knowledge of what is already in place
- Develop leader and mentor system.

Key Themes

The following is a consolidation of the key themes across all groups to provide supports and incentives to early childhood and afterschool providers working in home-based or center-based programs. The specific recommendations and items from the small groups are listing in bullet format. The order of the themes is not intended to reflect priority.

I. Supports and Incentives for Providers and Programs

Access

Multiple dimensions were identified to ensure accessibility to professional development and quality improvement including: affordability; availability; appropriateness; adaptability/flexibility. Each of these aspects is listed separately below.

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Affordable –Reasonably Priced Opportunities

Professional development opportunities need to be affordable to both providers and programs.

- Affordable professional development opportunities for providers
- Affordability for programs
- Reasonably priced opportunities

Available -- Increased Methods And Channels For Delivery of Content

Stakeholders noted barriers to accessing professional development opportunities and recommended actions to expand methods and improve access.

- You get what you want and need
- Currently not in all areas of the state
- Offer different times and days
- On-line/Increase use of technology Long-distance and non-traditional professional development opportunities

Appropriate -- Expanded Learning Content and Formats

Need to increase local opportunities that are high quality, meaningful and diverse to meet all levels of learners and to promote implementation of best practices (program imp) including extended learning opportunities.

- Relevant
 - individualized, helpful, personable, continuous, connected
 - Who you serve, where you are professionally (range)
 - Relevant to day-to-day work
 - Providers help plan professional development opportunities (voucher system?)
- Topics/Formats
 - New, original training topics
 - Providers want to participate in groups of peers (for support and to feel comfortable)
 - Responsive to local interests and needs; learning styles; individual needs; time constraints and challenges
 - Access to high level trainings
 - Pre-service training – BA's, AAAS
 - Follow up opportunities that extend learning to practice (MATCH), extend 2 hour workshops
 - More comprehensive opportunities (beyond 2 hour workshops) that bring individuals closer to IPDP and programs closer to 5-Star+ accreditation.
 - Offer in-depth training (extended learning)
- Quality
 - Assure all opportunities are high quality
 - Competency based instructors so can measure, identify quality of instruction

Information About What Is Available And How To Access It

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There are gaps in knowledge among providers about the existing frameworks, the professional development opportunities available for practitioners, and the programmatic supports for quality improvement.

- Information about what is available and how to access it
 - (Lack of) clarity about what counts as “training”
- Really well-coordinated information systems about what’s available who is qualified to provide trainings; who charges how much
 - “Warm Line” w/ timely, accurate info
- Support for providers to use the system
- Instructions/training on BFIS and Northern Lights

Marketing/Outreach to Promote the Value of the Frameworks and QI

The case needs to be made regarding the value of the professional development opportunities and quality improvement frameworks to both providers and the families they serve.

- Familiarize practitioners w/ the standards, information / education, career / job “professionalizing the field. Career advisement
 - Professional development is more than group instruction – defined, verified and aligned (licensing, STARS, ladder, BFIS)
 - BFIS / No. Lights “system” is understood
- Outreach and marketing
 - Info “blitz” and ongoing to agencies / directors / new staff / home providers
 - Users (esp. owners) educated about the why of using N.L. / STARS

Individual Bonuses/Recognition

A number of incentives were identified for individuals to seek training, for well-trained people to enter the field, and for highly trained people to stay in field.

- Recognition
 - More recognition for professional accomplishments / celebration
 - Career coach (IPDP’s and trainings)
 - For those who go above and beyond hours
- Compensation initiatives
 - Increased compensation for recognized achievement; pay increases connected to increase in professional development
 - Higher bonuses and/or pay with increased career ladder levels
- Award CEU’s for training opportunities

Individual Financial Support

In addition to bonuses and recognition, individuals need direct financial support for professional development.

- Financial support for training
- higher level learning and higher degrees
- Scholarship and FA for credit bearing opportunities

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Program Incentives and Rewards

Additionally, incentives are needed for programs to encourage use and adoption of the quality improvement frameworks.

- More than 1-time bonus for STARS—STARS bonus every time
- Yearly incentive for maintaining higher level of STARS (\$ higher certificate)
- Higher bonuses w/ increased STARS level
- Re-examine fee structure - FAP – STAR benefit to program
- Professional development built into fee structure – various funding sources
- Financial incentive (not connected to subsidy)
- Financial incentives for maintaining high quality standards
- Money to pay increases connected to professional development
- Grants available tied to recognized levels (STARS, No. Lights)?
- Support linked to quality improvement

Funding/Supports for Programs

Programs also need direct financial support to use towards quality improvement efforts.

- Equipment grants
- Grants for program specific supplies, materials
- Money for subs (release time)
- Money for professional development built into program fee structuring
- System that builds in/supports TIME to pursue professional development opportunities
- Administrative support for STARS and accreditation

Consultation to Programs

Stakeholders recommended multidisciplinary expert consultation available to programs to assist with professional development and quality improvement.

- Expert consultation (H, MH, EC, Nut, B/2)
- Push forward on “MATCH” efforts, funding, status, etc.
- MATCH integrated into system, i.e. incentives to join, competencies, grants
- Starting points

Mentor Support System for Individuals

There was widespread agreement on the need to develop and support a mentoring system—including on-site visits with providers and group/cohort support.

- Financial support and going supports for mentors and MATCH
- On-site mentor
- Local / regional learning cohorts / partnerships. Groups learning together.
- Mentoring / individual supports by peers and experts; time/opportunities to build connections to colleagues

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- Coaching and mentoring (MATCH / FEL) for everyone
- Quality assurance in mentoring

II. Central Level Changes and Supports

In addition to identifying specific supports and incentives for providers and programs, stakeholders recognized a number of changes at the state level that would help to professionalize the field through professional development and quality improvement.

Systems Coordination

A number of suggestions were made to improve the system of support for professional development and quality improvement efforts through improved alignment and coordination.

- Tight alignment between STARS / ladder / reg's / credentials
- System interactions and impacts
- User friendliness
- Inter-connectedness / seamlessness of systems
- Getting the bugs out
- Strengthening local resource system; more higher-level training where people live and work, based on need / request that meets standards. More regional collaborative grants

Flexible Pathways to QI

Other suggested the need to recognize the multiple pathways to professional development and quality improvement.

- Various pathways to credentials
- CL recognize other routes- ECE degree is not the guarantee of a high quality teacher
- Flexible and easy to use system. Outside opportunities – 1 system cannot meet all needs – allow for outside.
- More flexibility to accept professional development experiences offered by trainers that are good but not approved by NLCDC.
- Recognizing that what fits for EC may not work for AS and building flexibility into larger systems.

Regulation/Mandate

There was discussion about the role of regulation in supporting utilization of professional development opportunities and quality improvement frameworks. A few suggestions were offered that need to be explored further.

- CDD regulations need to be aligned w/ career ladder; interactions between STARS, licensing and subsidy
- Require STARS programs to be BFIS credential users
- Mandated basic introduction to ECE
- Mandate (45 hr course for home / centers / all providers. Have STARS and BFIS)
- Mandate: licensing... orientation to system, MATCH
- Orientation for all new workers – FCC and licensed staff
- Increase weight given to professional development in STARS

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Quality Evaluation

Particular measures were suggested to evaluate the quality of the professional development opportunities and the quality improvement efforts supported by the state and implemented by providers.

- Depth, dosage, duration, connection
- Quality assurance
- Evaluating impact on practice
- Expertise of consultation
- Multi-modal